

PROSPECT,

OR

View of the Moral World,

BY ELIHU PALMER.

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No. III.

CHARACTERS IN THE CHRISTIAN DRAMA.

(Continued from our last.)

WHEREVER human beings have been drawn into a system of theology, it has been the policy of believers in such system to extol their characters to the highest point, and surround them with the honors and attributes of divinity itself. Jesus the second person in the trinity is made by trinitarians an object of adoration—to him they address their prayers and supplications, believing that his merit—his atoning blood, will become the ground of their eternal happiness. Jesus Christ appeared in the shape and form of a man, and the physical demonstration that he was human, is not superior to the moral evidence, which makes in favor that he was composed of terrestrial materials—that he partook in many respects of the infirmities of man—that he was inferior in talents and virtues to Socrates, Seneca, and many other eminent philosophers, both ancient and modern. If he had been equal to God, or if he had partaken in any respect of the divine nature, his conduct would have been more dignified, his answers to the multitude more decisive, his view of moral and theological truth more comprehensive—in short he would have displayed to the world a more commanding character, and marked the progress of his life with indeliable testimonies of his divinity. Instead of this, however, he appears timid and irresolute—too ignorant to give a satisfactory explanation to questions with which he ought to have been perfectly well acquainted. If he preached the doctrine of a moral regeneration, he ought to have been both able and willing to have given compleat information concerning so important a change. The reverse, however, is the fact, for he evades the explicit inquiry of Nicodemus, who was anxious to know in what manner men could be

born again—he says the wind bloweth where it listeth, and no man knows whence it cometh or whither it goeth, so is every one that is born of the spirit. This on the part of Jesus amounts to an affirmation, that upon the important subject of regeneration there is a total and universal ignorance. It also includes in it a very strong suspicion that Jesus himself was incapable of giving any satisfactory explanation. Moral philosophers, or the instructors of mankind labor to render clear and intelligible, every principle which they develope—they mark its properties with just and accurate discriminations—they present it with all possible perspicuity to the human understanding, and rejoice whenever they find that success has crowned their efforts. Not so with the *divine Jesus*—equivocation and mystery are essential ingredients in his character—he discloses to his chosen few the extent of his knowledge, and this we have no reason to believe was very great; but to the herd of mankind—to the swinish multitude which were without, he took delight in dealing in parables, and in mysteries. Was this man destined by the creator, to be the great saviour of the world, the moral instructor of the human race! we believe not—for every instrutor should be candid, intelligent and communicative—mystery and reserve are evidences of conceited folly, or dark design. It is fairly to be presumed that if God thought proper to improve upon his natural system by one which was supernatural, it must have been a real and not a spurious improvement. In addition, therefore, to the marvellous works which Jesus was sent to perform, he ought also to have been empowered by his father, or expressly commanded to furnish an apostate world with a moral system of a pure and excellent nature. This has not been done; for if the gospel contains solitary maxims of useful morality—it furnishes nothing systematic in this respect; and of course is inferior to the productions of philosophers who lay no claim to inspiration or divinity of character. These philosophers acting by the force of their natural powers have discovered more important principles, and exhibited a greater perspicuity in moral precept than either Jesus, Paul, or any other character concerned in this theological drama.

SUPERSTITION has always been at war with science—this will be extremely evident if we resort to the declarations of sacred writ and the decisions of ecclesiastical councils in its favor. All heretics are proscribed by the church and

denounced as bad men. But what is heresy, or what is it to be a bad man in the estimation of the church? The following bitter decree against Galileo, one of the greatest men that ever existed on earth, will demonstrate sufficiently the rancorous hostility in which christian superstition formerly indulged itself. If modern christian philosophers have become more civil, it is because the demonstrations of Newton and others, have thrown in the way an everlasting bar to their calumnies against these physical truth. The following is the decree to which we have reference.

GALILEO.

The following literary curiosity is said to be a correct translation of the famous sentence of the inquisition passed upon GALILEO for his heretical opinions in astronomy and natural philosophy.

“ **W**e, Gaspar, of the title of the holy cross of Jerusalem, Borgia, brother Felix Certinus, of the title of St. Anastatia, surnamed of Asculum.

Guides of the title of St. Mary, of the people, Bentivolis, brother Desiderius Coaglia, of the title of Saint Charles, surnamed of Cremona.

Brother Antonius Barbarinas, surnamed of St. Onuphrins, Landivious Zacchia, of the title of St. Peter in Vinculis, surnamed of St. Sixtus.

Belingerious, of the title of St. Augustine Gyposius.

Fabaricius of St. Lawrence.

Francis of St. Lawrence.

Martin of the new St. Mary and Ginethis, Deacons, by the mercy of God, cardinals of the holy Roman catholic church, and specially deputed by the holy apostolical see, as inquisitors general against heretical perverseness throughout the whole christian commonwealth.

Whereas you, Galileo, son of the late Vincent Galileo, of Florence, being seventy years of age, had a charge brought against you, in the year 1615, in this holy office, that you held as true an erroneous opinion held by many, namely, that the sun is the centre of the world, and immovable, and that the earth moves even with a diurnal motion: also, that you had certain scholars into whom you instilled the same doctrine: also, that you maintained a correspondence on this point with certain mathematicians of Germany: also, that

you published certain epistles, treating of the solar spots, in which you explained the same doctrine as true, because you answered to the objections, which, from time to time were brought against you, taken from the holy scripture, by glossing over the said scripture according to your own sense ; and that afterwards, when a copy of writing in the form of an epistle, written by you to a certain great scholar of yours was presented to you (it following the hypothesis of Copernicus) you stood up for and defended, certain propositions in it, which are against the true sense and authority of the holy scripture.

This holy tribunal desiring, therefore, to provide against the inconveniences and mischief, which have issued hence, and increased to the danger of our holy faith—agreeable to the mandate of Lord N—, and the very eminent doctors, cardinals of this supreme and universal inquisition, two propositions respecting the immobility of the sun, and the motion of the earth, were and propounded, as under :

That the sun is in the centre of the world, and immovable in respect to local motion, is an absurd proposition, false in philosophy, and formerly heretical, seeing it is expressly contrary to holy scripture.

That the earth is not the centre of the world, nor immovable, but moves even with a diurnal motion, is also an absurd proposition, false in philosophy, and considered theologically, is at least an error in faith.

To the end such pernicious doctrine might be intirely extirpated, and spread no farther to the grevious detriment of the catholic verity, a decree was issued by the holy congregation *Indicis*, prohibiting the printing of books which treat of such sort of doctrine, which was therein pronounced false, and altogether contrary to holy and divine scripture.

But that your grievous and pernicious error and transgression may not remain unpunished, and that you may hereafter be more cautious, serving as an example to others, that they may abstain from the like offences, we decree that the book of the dialogue of Galileo be prohibited by public edict, and we condemn yourself to the prison of this holy office, to a time to be limited by our discretion ; and we enjoin, under the title of salutary penance, that during three years to come, you recite once a week, the seven penitential psalms, reserving to ourselves the power of moderating, changing or taken away intirely or in part, the aforesaid penalties and penances.

And so we say, pronounce and by our sentence declare, enact, condemn, and reserve, by this and every other better mode of formula, by which of right, we can and ought.

So we, the underwritten cardinals, pronounce, F. Cardinal de Asculo, G. Cardinal Bentivolus, F. Cardinal de Cremona, Fr. Antony Cardinal S. Onuphrii, B. Cardinal Gypsius, F. Cardinal Verospius, M. Cardinal Ginettus.

THE ABJURATION OF GALILEO.

I, Galileo Galilei, son of the late Vincent Galilei, a Florentine, of the age of seventy, appearing personally in judgment, and being on my knees in the presence of you, most eminent and most reverend Lords, Cardinals of the Universal Christian Commonwealth, Inquisitors General against heretical depravity, having before my eyes the holy gospels, on which I now lay my hands, swear that I always believed, and now believe, and, God helping, that I shall for the future always believe whatever the holy catholic and apostolic Roman church holds, preaches, and teaches. But because this holy office had enjoined me by receipt, entirely to relinquish the false dogma, which maintains that the sun is the centre of the world and immoveable, and that the earth is not the centre and moves—not to hold, defend, and teach by any means, or by writing, the aforesaid false doctrine—and after it had been notified to me, that the aforesaid doctrine is repugnant to the holy scripture, I have written and printed a book in which I treat of the same doctrine already condemned, and adduce reasons with great efficacy in favor of it, not offering any solution of them; therefore I have been adjudged and vehemently suspected of heresy, namely, that I maintained and believed, that the sun is the centre of the world, and immoveable, and that the earth is not the centre, and moves.

Therefore, being willing to take out of the minds of your eminences, and of every catholic christian this vehement suspicion, of right conceived against me, I, with sincere heart and faith unfeigned, abjure execrate, and detest the above said errors and heresies, and generally every other error and sect contrary to the above said holy church: and I swear that I will never any more hereafter say or assert, by speech or writing, any thing through which the like suspicion may be had of me—but if I shall know any one heretical, or suspected of heresy, I will denounce him to this holy office, or to the inquisitors and ordinary of the place in which I shall be. I moreover

swear and promise, that I will fulfill and observe entirely all the penitences which have been imposed upon me, or which shall be imposed by this holy office. But if it shall happen, that I shall go contrary (which God avert) to any of my words, promises, protestations, and oaths, I subject myself to all the penalties and punishments, which by the holy canons and other constitutions, general and particular, have been enacted and promulgated aganist such delinquents—So help me God, and his holy Gospels, on which I now lay my hands.

I, the aforesaid Galileo Galilei, have abjured, sworn, promised, and have bound myself as above, and in the fidelity of those with my own hands, and have subscribed to this present writing of my abjuration, which I have recited word by word. At Rome, in the convent of Minerva, this 22d day of June, of the year 1632.

I, Galileo Galilei, have abjured as above with my own hand.

THE PROGRESS OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

A CANDID but rational inquiry into the progress and establishment of Christianity, may be considered as a very essential part of the history of the Roman empire. While that great body was invaded by open violence, or undermined by slow decay, a pure and humble religion gently insinuated itself into the minds of men, grew up in silence and obscurity, derived new vigour from opposition, and finally erected the triumphant banners of the cross on the ruins of the capitol. Nor was the influence of christianity confined to the period or to the limits of the Roman empire. After a revolution of thirteen or fourteen centuries, that religion is still professed by the nations of Europe, the most distinguished portion of human kind in arts and learning as well as in arms. By the industry and zeal of the Europeans, it has been widely diffused to the most distant shores of Asia and Africa; and by the means of their colonies has been firmly established from Canada to Chili. In a world unknown to the ancients.

But this inquiry, however useful or entertaining, is attended with two peculiar difficulties. The scanty and suspicious materials of ecclesiastical history seldom enable us to dispel the dark cloud that hangs over the first age of the church. The great law of impartiality too often obliges us

to reveal the imperfections uninspired teachers and believers of the gospel—and to a careless observer, *their* faults may seem to cast a shade on the faith which they professed.—But the scandal of the pious christian, and the fallacious triumph of the infidel, should cease as soon as they recollect not only *by whom*, but likewise *to whom*, the Divine Revelation was given. The theologian may indulge the pleasing task of describing Religion as she descended from Heaven, arrayed in her native purity. A more melancholy duty is imposed on the historian. He must discover the inevitable mixture of error and corruption, which she contracted in a long residence upon earth, upon a weak and degenerate race of beings.

Our curiosity is naturally prompted to inquire by what means the christian faith obtained so remarkable a victory over the established religions of the earth. To this inquiry, an obvious but satisfactory answer may be returned. That it was owing to the convincing evidence of the doctrine itself and to the ruling providence of its great author. But as truth and reason seldom find so favorable a reception in the world, and as the wisdom of providence frequently condescends to use the passions of the human heart, and the general circumstances of mankind, as instruments to execute its purpose; we may still be permitted, though with becoming submission, to ask, not indeed what were the first, but what were the secondary causes of the rapid growth of the christian church. It will, perhaps appear, that it was most effectually favoured and assisted by the five following causes. I. The inflexible, and, if we may use the expression, the intolerant zeal of the christians, derived it is true, from the Jewish religion, but purified from the narrow and unsocial spirit, which instead of inviting, had deterred the gentiles from embracing the law of Moses. II. The doctrine of a future life, improved by every additional circumstance which could give weight and efficacy to that important truth. III. The miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive church. IV. The pure and austere morals of the christians. V. The union and discipline of the christian republic, which gradually formed an independent and increasing state in the heart of the Roman empire.

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